

RD-19

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Where should the main responsibility lie?

Analyzing evidence on complicity, handling informants, identifying suspects, arresting, interrogating, preparing cases for trial or disposition: these are police functions, best handled, so far as possible, by policemen. Given present security conditions -- and the current shortage of National Police at district level and below -- the police function of apprehension must in many cases be performed (or at least supported) by military detachments. But in targetting these operations, and in sifting through streams of unarmed "civilian" suspects, an understanding of evidence and of law is needed, as is action within a framework of law; it should be only the VC, not the GVN, that operates as flagrant disturbers of law and order.

The basic fact is that the Communist Party apparatus in South Viet Nam is not going to be destroyed by amateurs at the task: and that includes soldiers, S/2's focused on order of battle and tactical intelligence, RD Cadre, "the people themselves", or vigilantes.

The Special Branch of the National Police, alone, was created for such tasks as collecting and analyzing intelligence on, and acting to apprehend, individuals engaged in a political conspiracy against the State; and Special Branch Policemen remain the only element trained and organized for this task.

They are, to be sure, still poorly trained and organized for it. The Special Branch is far from ready to carry out this mission effectively: both in terms of numbers of personnel and, even more, in their quality, training, education, experience and motivation. Indeed, in a search for adequate performance or capability in the short-run, there is simply nowhere to turn. The issue for policy is, rather, where to invest major attention and resources to creating an adequate capability; here the choice is clearer. The Special Branch offers by far the most advanced and logically appropriate foundation on which to build. Recognizing the primacy of its responsibility for the destruction of the Communist Party apparatus and associated VC infrastructure is an essential first step.

STET
→ People, Cadre and Government: What they ask of each other.

Cadre and People:

Discussions of Revolutionary Development commonly emphasize that the central object of the process is to win not only the sympathy but the active commitment and support of the people to the GVN side. This is seen as primarily

* PP. 20-29, Part II of "Roles and Missions Study", report to the Mission Council, Saigon, August, 1966.

the mission of the RD Cadre. But exactly what is desired of the people: how much and how urgently? And what can reasonably be expected of them: or of the cadre? Exponents of RD differ on the degree of public involvement that is regarded as necessary and attainable.

One influential view is that it is both feasible and essential to achieve a very high level of commitment to the GVN and total involvement in the defense against the VC, on a widespread basis, among villagers in areas currently contested or VC-controlled. This commitment would be embodied ultimately in a "people's self defense" or hamlet militia effort in which virtually everyone in the hamlet would participate vigorously--old women and children providing early warning, men and women building defenses and the younger men bearing arms--so as to ward off all but large-scale VC efforts to penetrate the hamlet for propaganda, tax-collection, recruiting, or assassination.

In its most ambitious form, this approach foresees a landscape of hedgehog defenses shutting out the VC, who wander rootless and harassed by a hostile partisan militia, unable to get a drink of water or the time of day -- even at gunpoint. "The people" will provide their own security, better than the PF (or implicitly, RF or ARVN) provide it today; they will themselves root out the concealed VC agents in their midst, as the police have so far neglected to do; and all this is to be brought about predominantly by the catalytic influence of the RD Cadre. Thus default by the GVN military and police on their responsibilities to protect the people and defeat conspiracy will be made good by an aroused citizenry shouldering the responsibilities themselves, a "countryside at arms."

We do not think this is going to happen.

It is too late in the war. These people have seen too many government promises broken, sooner or later, over the years: promises to remain, to protect them, to bring social justice and lasting benefits. Their resistance to active, visible involvement, now, reflects skepticism and fear that is rooted deep in bitter experience. They have seen Communist guerrilla presence outlast several pacification programs, many province chiefs and countless cadre. They are beyond the point where enthusiasm, major efforts, and truly deep commitment to a GVN are realistic mid-term demands. To ask of them at this point to take up a heavy burden of their own defense, to choose sides publicly and irrevocably, is to ask too much.

This is not to deny that hamlets and enclaves already exist where religious bonds and leadership or inspiring local officials have produced just the active self-defense that this concept demands. Cadre and officials should

indeed be alert to support this spirit where it emerges spontaneously, or where it is a genuine response to GVN efforts. But it is not now something to be programmed and scheduled, or expected or aimed for on a mass basis.

In most of the area that requires RD, a genuine, intense, high-level public involvement, reflected in truly effective "partisan" defense, is simply not to be achieved in a matter of months or a year or two, if ever: not by the Cadre as they are, or as they may become, or even in context of all the reforms suggested in this paper. To press for it in every case, to take it as the basic measure of Cadre and RD success, is to invite distortion of effort, counter-productive nagging and coercion by Cadre, self-deception, and false reporting. It is to ensure another failure, of a sort that grows more costly for the GVN each time.

Fortunately, no such tour de force need really be demanded of the RD Cadre. What is required in the mid-term is low to moderate-level public involvement on the GVN side: willing cooperation with government authorities, and increasing avoidance of collaboration with the VC (as described in the "Concept"). Under present circumstances, this is still an ambitious aim; and it is essential to thorough, lasting success in countering the guerrillas and Communist apparatus. On both counts, it would be an achievement worthy of the considerable efforts and reforms it demands from all agencies of government.

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People and Government

If the people in the contested areas are to cooperate with the GVN in this fashion, they must be persuaded that: (a) the risks of helping the GVN and of resisting the VC are acceptably low; (b) the GVN means to win, and (with Free World help) has the ability to win; (c) the GVN deserves their respect and support.

For most people in the rural areas, these beliefs would represent radical changes in attitude. Their present non-involvement, passive help to both sides when pressed, or apathy toward the GVN and covert aid to VC, flow from specific attitudes like the following, which must be countered:

- (1) The VC will win in the end: after the US leaves or stops fighting, when the whole effort against the VC will collapse.
- (2) The GVN will not stay in the local area, despite its promises; the VC will return (and its covert apparatus will remain throughout).
- (3) Any willing cooperation with the GVN will be noted by the local VC apparatus and eventually punished; participation as an elected or appointed

GVN official is likely to mean death.

cut (4) The RVNAF will not keep out the VC, will not support people's resistance against VC, and will not even reinforce friendly units under attack; RVNAF troops are a heavy burden upon the people, rather than ^{their} protectors of the people.

(5) GVN officials are indifferent to the welfare of the people.

(6) The GVN at low levels is the tool of the landlords and the local rich, at all levels, is a means to self-enrichment of officials.

(7) The corruption, lack of motivation, and inefficiency of GVN officials is in dramatic contrast to the VC hierarchy, which (in the minds of the peasants, including those who oppose the VC for their cruelty, their demands, their communism or atheism) is incorruptible, dedicated, and efficient.

None of these attitudes can be changed by GVN/Cadre words alone. Changing them is not merely a problem of communication or of "carrying the GVN message to the people." The supporting reality -- the element of truth underlying each of these beliefs -- must change.

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Words and actions of RD Cadre are scarcely the main evidence that shapes people's impressions of the nature of the GVN. When RD Cadre tell the villagers about the government, they are not speaking to the credulous or ignorant. They are speaking to the people who see "the government" every day, people who are watching and experiencing the conduct of government representatives -- ARVN, RF, PF, police, district and province officials, technical cadre -- even while the RD Cadre talk. If that conduct confirms what VC cadre say, rather than what RD Cadre say, the latter's words are wasted. Too often now that is the case. The very conception of the RD Cadre as a tool to promote a favorable image of the GVN is prompted by the failure of the RVNAF and regular GVN officials to have done so by their normal behavior: indeed, from the tendency of many units and officials to blacken the name of the GVN.

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The Cadre example at its best will have little lasting impact on the attitudes of the villagers so long as it must compete with the more vivid impressions formed by:

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(*) RVNAF units that fail to provide security; to operate at night or interfere with the movement of armed VC; to support hamlet Cadre or outposts

under attack at night; or even to protect themselves adequately against surprise.

Bullet ⊖ Rangers and other ARVN soldiers who steal chickens and pigs (under the eyes of their officers); who take meals and goods in the towns without paying; ignore police and civil authority; commit petty crimes without punishment; and terrorize the towns with drunken rampages, rape and undisciplined shooting.

Bullet ⊖ PF or RF units whose leaders hire them out to collect rents for rich landlords.

Bullet ⊖ Village and district officials and police who set a price on every service they provide; who sell supplies provided for "self-help" projects; who not only provide for a decent living and their "old-age security", but manage to grow unjustly rich through corruption.

Bullet ⊖ ARVN and sector artillery practices that contribute to insecurity and demonstrate indifference to welfare by erratic, unobserved, indiscriminate firing.

Bullet / ? ⊖ National Police who "charge toll" ^{5/14} at resources control checkpoints.

⊖ Officials and technical cadre totally lacking in competence, training, motivation or discipline.

⊖ GVN neglect of the welfare even of its own representatives and its most committed supporters; e. g., the low pay, poor medical care and lack of dependents' housing and support for RF/PF.

In securing vitally-needed collaboration by the public, VC arguments and coercion are most effective in ^{the} context of real GVN failings and abuses. GVN campaigns to win support and end the collaboration cannot wholly succeed while the abuses continue. (At best, some good impressions will join the bad, so that feelings toward the GVN progress toward ambivalence.) Before a change can be expected in the people's attitude and conduct toward the government, there must be a change in the government's attitude and conduct toward the people.

Promer Of first importance is improving the behavior of those government representatives whose misconduct the people see most widely and frequently and feel most acutely: the soldiers. The arrival of a Ranger battalion is generally

regarded now by townspeople and peasants alike as the coming of a scourge. (One Province Chief recently threatened to put trucks on the runway if a certain battalion of Rangers, already en route by air to his province, were not ordered back. In two provinces, villagers reportedly asked the VC to deliver them from the Ranger battalions then afflicting them). It is easy to believe that such troops have been worth far more to the VC than to the GVN. But this is only an extreme; most other units abuse the public less flamboyantly but more steadily, daily demonstrating in a multitude of ways their feelings of isolation from the public, their lack of responsibility to the people or respect for them. No GVN program or "psywar" measure could have such widespread, immediate and favorable impact as change in such attitudes and conduct by the soldiers; without that change, other efforts to improve the image of the GVN and induce more willing cooperation have scant chance of success.

The first step must be to bring about understanding in the RVNAF -- starting with the highest military commanders and working down to the junior officers and troops -- of the importance of proper, disciplined conduct to Revolutionary Development and to winning the war. (ARVN battalions newly committed to support of RD, in particular, need troop reorientation training). Effective "motivational training" aims first at just such understanding: plus understanding of the nature and aims of the war and the soldiers' role in it, to generate a sense of dignity, self-respect, and purpose, prerequisites to self-disciplined behavior. All troops and officers in RVNAF need that indoctrination (as does the civil side of the GVN): backed up increasingly by the example of dedication, purposeful direction and command discipline in their superiors. Second, the troops deserve more evidence of concern for their welfare by their government and country: above all, by pay protected from inflation and by adequate dependents' housing and other dependents' benefits (so that soldiers and their families will have less basis for the resentful belief that peasants, refugees, and Chieu Hoi ralliers should be doing "civic action" for them).

These measures are just as relevant to the achievement of higher combat performance. Within this framework of better understanding and incentives, military discipline should begin to be rigidly enforced at all levels within RVNAF ranks, to the ends both of adequate observance of military orders and regulations and of proper conduct toward the public. Probably no other program could so surely or with wide approval stamp a Government of Viet Nam as truly "revolutionary".

Cadre and Government

A comparable program of reform on the civil side of the GVN is likewise essential to the success of RD. Just as the RD Cadre need effective

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* Partly to underline the importance of ARVN conduct, one of the 81 recommendations of the Jacobson Roles and Mission Study Group was that Ranger units - which Col. Jacobson himself had been instrumental in instituting on an earlier tour, but on misconduct we had received a great deal of testimony - "because of their frequently intolerable conduct toward the populace, be disbanded with individual Rangers reassigned" (Pentagon Papers, Vol. II, p. 584.) The Pentagon Papers analyst notes: "This was a recommendation which MACV particularly opposed, arguing that it 'would seriously reduce ARVN combat strength.' Westmoreland added that he could not countenance the disbanding of units which had just received a Presidential Unit Citation."

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military performance in their area -- lest inadequate security or undisciplined troop conduct negate their efforts -- so they need good civil government over them if they are to carry out their mission.

As representatives of the national government, RD Cadre are often correctly described as indispensable links between the district level, where national government has traditionally stopped, and the hamlets and villages. But bridging that gap is of conditional value to the villager. Links to an indifferent, incompetent, or corrupt level of government are not worth very much to him. Cadre can testify to the intentions of the government to serve and protect the people; they can be a channel of grievances, aspirations and intelligence to higher authority. Yet if the government neglects to demonstrate those intentions in action -- if the district and province officials and technical cadre fail to act upon the Cadre information, to resolve grievances, satisfy reasonable aspirations, exploit intelligence -- the Cadre will have, in the end, little impact.

Support to be Moreover, experience already shows that the Cadre teams themselves need the supervision and guidance of alert, dedicated district and province officials if they are to work effectively. The attitude and concern of the District Chief appears most critical to their performance. Where the District Chief is conscientious, sees the RD Cadre as "his" workers, and understands their mission, they are showing encouraging promise. Where the District Chief is apathetic toward the Cadre and accepts no responsibility for them -- perhaps still the majority of districts when RD Cadre are deployed -- they act distressingly like most other "cadre" of recent years, i. e., they are prone to do almost nothing at all. (Mechanical census-taking threatens to succeed the mechanical fence-building of yesteryear.)

Ultimately, it is a delusion to imagine that RD Cadre could persist as an honest, highly motivated element in what continued to be a corrupt, apathetic administrative system. Where the district/province officials are corrupt, the Cadre will be forced to buy their appointments and promotions (and draft deferment), and to kickback on their salary; immersed from the start in a traditional pattern of petty corruptions, they will scarcely be inspired to be avid reformers in the hamlets. In the end the GVN will get the cadre it deserves: just as it now has the RVNAF and police it has deserved.

But what is true for the cadre is true for the District Chief: and on up the line. There is a deadly correlation between corruption at high levels in

Roman an administrative system and the spread throughout the system of incompetence, as higher-ups encourage and promote corrupt subordinates, and protect them from the consequences of poor performance of duty or direct disobedience of orders. Such a system demoralizes and "selects out" the able and the dedicated who do not play the game, and thwarts any attempts at reform initiated at intermediate levels. There is no escape from the requirement that reform, unlike revolution, must start at the top.

IV: Conclusion

Today the Government of Viet Nam and its Armed Forces need urgent radical reforms, starting from the top; including in particular, throughout the GVN structure: (1) marked reduction of corruption, (2) encouragement of leadership and initiative, and (3) promotion on merit.

Such reforms must replace the current tendency to make appointments and promotions primarily on the basis of diplomas, nepotism, political alliance, and kickbacks. The consequences of the present system are incompetence, lack of discipline, apathy, and encouragement of further corruption.

The military and administrative challenge posed by the Communist apparatus cannot be met by a government suffering these defeats: ~~which~~ ^{which} deprive the GVN of the ability to execute its programs. At the same time, the contrast (in the belief of most Vietnamese) to the Communists in these particular respects is an intolerable burden to the GVN in its political struggle with the VC for public and elite support.

more? The true urgency of these reforms does not emerge when one focuses upon the war against mobile, large-unit, regular Main Force and NVA forces, where Free World Military Assistance Forces have blocked military defeat and can continue to win significant successes without major help from RVNAF or the population. It is "only" in the ultimately vital war against VC guerrillas and apparatus for allegiance and control of the people in the countryside that GVN/RVNAF capability is and will remain crucial; and in which changes such as those discussed above mean the difference between potential success and almost certain failure. Very bluntly: present VC control in the countryside will not be rolled back significantly or permanently by the GVN/RVNAF system as it now functions. Nor will the political struggle in the countryside be won at all unless the GVN and RVNAF become capable of winning it.

But x An apparent alternative to high-level, thoroughgoing reform would be for the US to substitute its own authority and capability for that of the GVN: bypassing the GVN in direct relations with Province Chiefs, RD Cadre, and troop commanders, or relying wholly on US-executed military and civil programs. Unaccompanied by an increase in GVN capability, this approach would fail in the long run. It would fail for many reasons, but one of the most fundamental is simply that the Vietnamese people do not expect the US to remain in Viet Nam bearing such responsibility indefinitely. Therefore, it is to the relative capabilities for struggle of the GVN and the VC apparatus that Vietnamese will look for answers to the crucial question: "Who is going to win in the end?"

Romon Until the GVN begins to appear capable of gaining adequate popular participation and of countering a Communist resurgence on its own, after US involvement has lessened, FWMAF successes will appear to most Vietnamese (including the VC) as no more than holding operations postponing eventual GVN political defeat. That belief will preclude widespread Vietnamese commitment, adequate cooperation or involvement in the struggle against the VC: hence in turn, block real progress toward GVN (and US) aims.

Thus ^a/US "takeover", whether blatant or tacit and pragmatic, does not provide ^a/adequate answer. At the same time, the radical changes required within the GVN and RVNAF seem most unlikely to occur without the strong, focused, and coordinated exertion of US influence at high levels. The goal of such private US "intervention" must be a GVN capable of winning the support of its population and of winning the war. But in this pursuit as well, the main bulk of the steady pressure and energy for reform must come eventually from Vietnamese. And in these efforts, as in the fight against the VC, there is need both for popular participation and for dedicated leadership.

Many of the young Vietnamese needed for success in a long political struggle -- capable of able leadership and of tireless, selfless commitment to a cause that inspires them -- are in VC cadre ranks today; and there are many more outside the VC, but fewer devoted to the GVN. To attract these young potential "activists" to the GVN effort -- both from the uncommitted ranks, and eventually, from within the VC -- initial steps toward reform are needed; but also more than reform: a chance to work toward meaningful public goals.

It is a striking fact that both sides, VC and GVN, proclaim publicly almost identical political goals for South Viet Nam (a tribute to their validity in Vietnamese terms, despite - save for unification - their "American" ring: security, freedom, independence, democracy, village reform, social

justice, development and modernization, public welfare and happiness.

On the VC side, much of this "platform" is cynical and expedient in the eyes of the Communist elite, whose covert ideals call for "modernization" on a 50-year-old blueprint of forced-draft industrialization under totalitarian controls, capitalized by exploitation of the peasants and preceded by a bloodbath to destroy or terrorize potential opposition: a vision so stark and repelling it must be kept esoteric.

There is no such ideological obstacle on the GVN side to giving unprecedented substance to the popular principles -- of government responding to and serving the welfare of the people -- it already professes. There are only obstacles of inertia, short-sightedness, and past despair.* These can be overcome.

The war with the VC for the allegiance and the governing of the people of South Viet Nam can be won: but only by RVNAF soldiers who have come to feel and act as protectors and friends of the people, and GVN officials who come to feel and act as servants of the people. That means today, it is in their hearts and minds, and conduct, that revolutionary development must first take place.

(Or as General Taylor put it two years earlier in the November, 1961 briefing cited in the prefatory note):

"If, as the evidence shows, we are playing a losing game in South Vietnam, it is high time we change and find a better way. To change the situation, it is quite clear that we need to do three things: first, establish an adequate government in SVN..." (Pentagon Papers, Vol. III, p. 668)

* And of class and status interest, the history, politics and sociology of ruling elites, their total dependence on foreign (U.S.) support, the short-term domestic political needs of the foreign rulers and the long-term economic interests of the foreign ruling groups, to name a few more obstacles I had missed, not so easily overcome.